



# General Election 2020

Support Children. Support Families - Because childhood lasts a lifetime.

#GE2020

#FamilySupport

## Introduction

The children and families that Barnardos work with have been affected by traumatic life events such as abuse, parental mental health, bereavement and addiction. In 2019, we saw a marked increase in the number of children being referred to our services with more complex needs.

While most children in Ireland are doing well, at least one-fifth have poor economic, social and educational outcomes. This group must be a priority for the next government. Successive governments and the political

system is failing to adequately address the complex issues facing this cohort of children.

Through targeted investment and reform, the next government can ensure that public services deliver a real and sustainable change for families.

The priorities set out in our manifesto are based on our work with over 18,000 children and families across Ireland and our experience and expertise in this area.

### **PRIORITY ONE.** **Sustainable investment in family support**

Research commissioned by Barnardos in 2019 found that Ireland is spending an additional €6.95bn addressing preventable social problems such as obesity, drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence against children. This is not an accident of history but the result of clear policy choices.

Early intervention, through family support, can address the lasting impact of childhood adversity enabling children and their families to build resilience, to believe in their capacities and to live with hope and positive expectations for themselves and their children. The next Government should:

- Invest in prevention and early intervention to respond appropriately to public health issues related to childhood trauma. This includes developing a funding model that adequately and equitably funds organisations delivering Family Support services on behalf of the state.
- Tackle waiting lists by adopting a triaging referral pathway for children requiring additional support because of a developmental delay (such as speech and language), behavioural, social and emotional needs or disability. This should focus on utilising innovative, age-appropriate holistic solutions within the community.
- Embed intensive and individualised family support services in communities where families are trying to deal with complex and traumatic life experiences such as parental separation, addiction, domestic abuse and homelessness.

### **PRIORITY TWO.** **Reform the judicial, health and social care services surrounding families**

The children and families we work with are often interacting with a range of state services in parallel with organisations in the community and voluntary sector. Inadequacies in state services can jeopardise positive outcomes achieved through community-based interventions. Reform and reorganisation needs to be prioritised in the following areas:

#### **Judicial**

- The new government must recommit to the redevelopment of Hammond Lane to ensure the provision of facilities that are fit for purpose to meet both current and future need. Adequate budget should be allocated and the development should be completed within the lifetime of the government.
- Commit to the establishment of a national system of Child Contact Centres to facilitate contact for parents and children where needed.

#### **Health and Social Care**

- Recognise and formalise the community and voluntary sector's integral role in the delivery of state services.
- Commit to the further development and delivery of a whole family approach to mental health services.

#### **Social Welfare**

- Set a timeline and roadmap for the benchmarking of weekly social welfare payment rates against the costs of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) ensuring a socially acceptable minimum standard of living for all.

### **PRIORITY THREE.** **Truly free education for all children**

Every child should have an equal access to education and full participation should not be based on their parents' ability to pay. Since 2005, Barnardos has been highlighting the substantial costs incurred by parents in subsidising the underfunded school system.

- As a first step, the next government must commit to ensuring that primary school education will be free to all children within the lifetime of the next government.
- Develop a roadmap for the introduction of free second level education for all young people.

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